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Terrorism threatens Mideast equilibrium

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Terrorism, specifically state-supported terrorism, is rapidly becoming an important strategic weapon in the Middle East, affecting the local, regional and international balance of power.

While experts disagree about the measures that will work to combat terrorism, there is a consensus among students of the problem that terrorism is now a low-level form of warfare used by states to advance their interests.

"The largest internal threat in the Middle East is the threat of the Islamic fundamentalists" using terror, a senior Defense Department official told The Washington Times.

He said U.S. officials were concerned about the activities of Iran in Lebanon and the Gulf states. Islamic fundamentalism, he said, was also a threat to the political and social order in Egypt.

A recent report by the Senate Subcommittee on Security and Terror said that "400 international terrorist attacks took place against U.S. diplomatic and military facilities and U.S. personnel between 1973 and the end of 1983." Eighty-three percent of these incidents were in the Middle East.
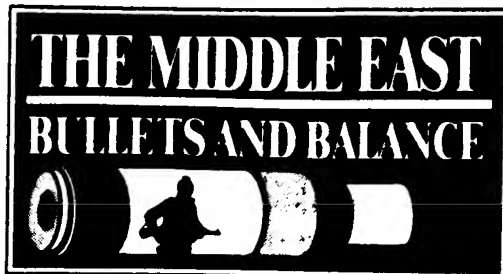
A study by Brian Jenkins of the Rand Corporation predicted that the world is entering a new era characterized by an increase in state-supported terror. The Middle East, the study said, would continue to be a major target area.

Most important, in the view of American policymakers, is that pro-Western states in the area are increasingly becoming targets of state-supported terror.

State-supported terror could subvert the strategic balance in the area through subversion and the assassination of pro-Western leaders, according to Robert Kupperman of the Georgetown Institute for Strategic and International Studies.

Governments in the area have been intimidated, he said, because "heads of state are in danger. They can be murdered by [Libyan leader Col. Muammar] Qaddafi," and other anti-Western regimes.

Mr. Kupperman listed Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Egypt as countries in imminent danger. He said that the Soviets "don't want massive destabilization, but want to weaken the fabric of relations between the U.S. and moderate Arab states."

terror goes back decades, according to Yonah Alexander of the State University of New York. "The Soviets have a conscious philosophy to utilize terror to further their strategic interests," he said.

"The first camp was established in Tashkent in 1920. They brought Third World recruits to be trained in 'wars of national liberation.' During the 1930s they set up an infrastructure in Lebanon among the Armenians in the ASALA movement (Seeret Army for the Liberation of Armenia)," he said.

Current Soviet efforts include training Shi'ite terrorists in the Soviet Union, according to Mr. Alexander.

"Through proxies — Syria, Libya and even the Iranians — the Soviets have set up a terror network," in the Middle East, he added. Terrorists are trained at 20 bases in Libya, in Syria and in Syrian-controlled areas of Lebanon, as well as in Iran and South Yemen.

The Senate report, prepared by Ray Cline, former deputy director of the CIA, and Mr. Alexander said that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's regime in Iran "organizes, plans and assigns the missions of terrorists, mainly Shi'ite Moslems, operating in the Mideast and beyond. Qaddafi contributes monetary aid and arms, at least to a limited extent. [Syrian leader Hafez] Assad gives local approval to proposed operations . . . All three coordinate their efforts."

Mr. Alexander confirmed other reports that at a meeting last January the foreign ministers of these states "agreed on escalation of terror against U.S. and Western interests."

Middle East terrorists long have cooperated with terrorist organizations worldwide. Mr. Alexander cited recent examples, including the recent visit of Iranian Prime Minister Hossein Mossavi to Cuba "to discuss cooperation in anti-American activities. Another example, is the fact that Iranians and Palestinians are in training in Nicaragua."

State-supported terror is the latest tactic radical states use to further their interests.

Libya is involved in subversion in Ghana, Gabon, Chad and Senegal, as well as the Middle East, in an effort to spread Islam into sub-Saharan Africa. Col. Qaddafi also has declared interest in destabilizing pro-Western governments and destroying Israel.

Syria continues to pursue a divide-and-rule policy in Lebanon,

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